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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002114

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: PROVINCIAL ELECTION PREPARATIONS MOVING FORWARD BUT INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT NEEDED

Classified By: Classified by Ninewa PRT Leader Jason Hyland: Reasons 1.  
4 (b,d).

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

Summary

**¶1.** (C) Preparations for provincial elections in Ninewa are moving forward well, with the Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) beginning to work closely with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to coordinate security for voter registration sites and election sites. Most people in Ninewa are ready to vote, and want to focus on issues rather than ethnic or religious affiliation in the upcoming elections (but may vote along ethnic or sectarian lines anyway). There have been no surprises thus far in terms of problems faced by the GEO, and numerous issues remain to be solved before elections can be held. Most people await the passage of a national election law to sort out many of the issues being faced by provincial election authorities. Although there are no plans for international long-term election observation, all involved stress the desire for independent international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), to get involved soonest to monitor and assess the fairness of the elections.

Election Preparations Moving Forward Well

**¶2.** (SBU) Election preparations are moving ahead relatively well in Ninewa. The GEO director is in place and conducting regular meetings with relevant stakeholders. Due to the hard work of the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment (3ACR), the GEO and the chief of election security for the province, Major General Hassan, are planning to hold regular meetings to discuss and coordinate security for the voter registration and election sites. According to the GEO director, voter registration will now be held in the province for 45 days starting July 15. (Note: This indicates a lack of communication between IHEC and the GEOs, as this first phase of the voter registration process will only last thirty days. End comment.)

People Ready to Vote -- On Issues

**¶3.** (SBU) PRT Officers met with voters and political party leaders from across the province and one message came across loud and clear ) people are ready and eager to vote in the upcoming elections. Citizens across the board were adamant that elections needed to happen on time. Furthermore, many citizens said that they were ready to move past sectarian- and religious-based politics and vote based on important issues, such as essential services, education, etc. (Comment:

Given the current political realities in Ninewa, though, it is likely that voters will largely vote according to ethnic or sectarian lines.)

No Surprises: Kurdish Heavy-Handedness and Sunni Disorganization

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¶4. (C) There have been no major surprises in the province thus far in terms of problems faced by the GEO. Several Kurdish political groups have come together and registered as a coalition for Nineva Province. Kurdish parties, especially the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), have been relatively heavy-handed in many of the districts in the northeast (Tel Kaif, Shekhan, and Hamdaniya) and in the west (Sinjar) due to tensions arising from the discussions on disputed boundaries under Article 140. Rumors of Kurdish security forces stating that they would be providing election security in disputed areas have already caused some worries over Kurdish intimidation of voters, especially in areas with large minority (Christian and Yezidi) populations. (Note: Many PRT contacts stated that, during the 2005 elections, Kurdish Forces turned non-Kurds away from voting locations in Kurdish-controlled areas. End Note.) Both the GEO and the ISF claim to be following up on such complaints.

¶5. (C) Sunni parties complain of their potential disenfranchisement and the general disorganization of the non-Kurd parties in some parts of the province. In the far west, near the key crossing point of Rabe'ea on the Syrian border, the head Sheikh of the Shammar tribe, Sheikh

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Abdullah, complained that election workers in the area were all Kurdish and that the Sunni Arabs were not accurately represented in the area. (Note: IHEC workers are selected in Baghdad through a process overseen by UNAMI. End note.) Many Sunni parties in the west and the south complain of a lack of internal organization and inability to campaign effectively in their areas.

Provincial Election Law Needed

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¶6. (SBU) Everyone in the province, from government officials to political leaders to everyday people, recognizes the urgent need for a provincial election law to be passed immediately by the Council of Representatives. Without a law, citizens stress, the GEO will not be able to move forward effectively with planning and they cannot work to educate the voters on what to expect in the upcoming elections.

International Organizations Top Priority

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¶7. (SBU) In a recent meeting with the PRT and Coalition Forces, the GEO and the head of the ISF stressed the importance of international organizations coming to Nineva immediately to begin monitoring and assisting in the preparations for elections. According to the GEO Director, the UN and other international organizations had not been in contact or visited with the GEO or with the ISF. Many people in the province also complained that, during the 2005 elections, NGOs and the UN were &invisible8 in the province.

Comment

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¶8. (C) While UNAMI and USAID/IFES are closely assisting IHEC in preparations for the election, there are currently no concrete plans on the part of IHEC or UNAMI to field international election observers. NDI and UNAMI (via UNOPS) are training domestic observers who will monitor polls on election day. There are no observers for the

registration process, but UNAMI will be visiting some registration centers during the 30-day registration period. While Ninewa officials appear eager for involvement of international organizations, it is not clear what precisely they are looking for besides general "monitoring." UNAMI already has the lead for the international community and is deeply involved in addressing these issues. IHEC and UNAMI have discussed the possibility of international observers, who would be invited and organized centrally by IHEC to oversee elections in all provinces, but there are significant obstacles, especially security. Once an election law is passed and an election date is set, UNAMI may revisit the question with IHEC.

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